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Katharine Gill
Eastern Illinois University

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BY

KATHARINE GILL

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READING IN THE GRADES

By KATHARINE GILL,
Instructor in Reading.

THE subject of reading is far too broad and many-sided to admit of anything like full treatment in a single paper. It can be stretched to embrace everything from simple sight reading, up through the recital of dramatic monologues, to the presentation of a play; and, at each step, we should find material for extended discussion. The purpose of this paper, however, limits it to the consideration of the teaching of oral reading, or the expression of the thoughts of others, in the grades, and this purpose must include a careful study of the material to be used to accomplish certain results. It must be kept in mind that the term reading as used here means oral reading only: it does not include the study of literature or language, except as such study is inevitable in learning to read aloud intelligently and effectively. To the writer, moreover, an oral reading lesson means something very definite. It means a lively, interesting recitation in which some good bit of literature is used for a definite

purpose. It means every-day work with the pupil for rounded development in expression.

The idea of correlation has been so overdone, so abused, that one may seriously question the wisdom of its application to oral reading. The subject of reading is so many times made to correlate with other subjects that the child, and I doubt not the teacher also, becomes bewildered and hardly knows what he is studying. For his most rapid advancement, it is well to have it clearly understood that the end and aim of all work in the reading class is oral reading—good, intelligent, appreciative, enjoyable reading aloud of literature which, because of the beauty or energy of its thought and language, is worth reading aloud; that an oral reading lesson should not be a language lesson, save as one learns language by reading, committing, and reciting from the best authors; and that it should not be a literature lesson, except as the study for thought and for the expression of the thought is one form of the study of literature. Neither should an oral reading lesson be a lesson in physiology, to use an absurd illustration, just because a broken arm or leg is spoken of in the selection studied.

True, a reading lesson may be a mere reading lesson, and at the same time be, indirectly, a valuable lesson in history or biography, or may yet contribute to the pupil's knowledge of the natural world. A varied course in reading might include some vivid chapters from the historian or biographer, or a bit from the best work of some great naturalist; but the teacher should keep in mind that any such selection is given the pupil for the sake of helping him to express the author's thought, and not for the sake of teaching him the number of facts it may present, or of correlating with something else the information contained therein. Lastly, a lesson in oral reading should not be an exercise in lecturing on the part of the

teacher or of conversation with the children. It should be first and always one thing: at all times the emphasis should be laid on the oral expression. This motive should dominate the lesson. If other results than these definitely worked for creep in, well and good. Other results than good oral reading there certainly will be, but they are not to be worked for, lest the primary object be weakened, or, as in so many cases, lost sight of entirely. Steady work along one line at a time brings better results than the diffusive scattering over several lines, as is sometimes seen. The straight and narrow path in the study of reading brings early rewards, as concentration always does.

In addition to concentration of purpose during the recitation, the oral reading lesson should have its own period of time each day. This hour, even if it must be a short one, should be set aside every day, in every grade and—let it be said most emphatically—of this hour not one minute should be given to spelling, word analysis, language lessons, history, literature, or any other subject.

In the recitation, the important work of thought-getting, of seeing, understanding, realizing, and feeling must come first. There are always certain points that must be explained and cleared up; a particular setting is often required, and an atmosphere for the selection studied must be created. The children must be put in harmony with the story, poem, or oration itself. All of this may be done little at a time, as the recitation progresses, and the work of oral reading may move along throughout the entire hour. The recitation hour is one of effort, of continuous, repeated effort,—of effort to help the pupils get the thought of what they are reading; of effort to make them see, understand, feel; finally, of effort to help them to express orally what they see, understand, and feel. When the hour is over, every member of the class

should have had the privilege of expressing, in his best manner, some one or two thoughts, at least, and not only the teacher, but the pupils themselves, should feel that they have gained in the art of expressing.

Occasionally, an important part of the lesson is the assignment. Some of the interest of tomorrow's work depends upon what is said today about the new lesson In this, methods will vary as much as in the presentation of the subject, but for many, perhaps, the following suggestions will be helpful. In all grades, even in the higher ones, knowledge of words is so meagre that it seems best to say when assigning a new piece: "Read the lesson through aloud to find out what it is about. If you do not know at the end of the first reading, read it until you do know. Then, when you know what it is about, read it again. If it is a story, in this reading, watch the people, the characters. Try to see them move, listen to their voices, study their faces, see how they treat each other. Feel that you are looking at a play. Notice the action, the settings for the action, and the like. If the lesson to be studied is any bit of description, either prose or poetry, look at the little pictures that come to you as you read. Try to feel that you are on a train. As you go forward, pictures flash by you. There is a pretty bit of woods, a river, a bridge, a winding road, a cornfield, broad meadows with hills beyond; you catch glimpses of the sky—now a deep blue, now barred or flecked with clouds. Maybe you are running right into a sunset. As you read, let the pictures go by you in the same way. Each one will leave its impress upon your mind, so that when you get through, you have a larger picture of the whole. Now read your lesson once more as if you were reading it to an audience. Try to feel that a number of people must hear and understand every word you utter, and see every bit of action or description that

you give. If you are reading a part of an oration, try to impress the author's purpose—which, for the time being, is your own—upon your imaginary audience."

These are a few of the points which, from time to time, one might make in assigning lessons. Each lesson demands its own peculiar suggestions. All of this is with the idea of securing pleasant study. Another and equally important way of getting satisfactory study is to use tact, care, and taste in the selection of the matter to be studied. This brings us to the discussion of the material that is used in oral reading classes.

Just at present there is a strong feeling in favor of the use of the complete classics, however long they may be. Works of the class of Evangeline, Hiawatha, The Lady of the Lake, A Christmas Carol, Silas Marner, Water Babies, The Last of the Mohicans, are used. They are read in class, discussed and recited upon little at a time. Weeks and often months are spent upon this study of a single selection. Those that advocate this method of teaching reading do so strongly, and some of the reasons they give are the following:

1. That when through with the study of a certain classic upon which months have been spent, the pupils have it for life. They have its background, its whole setting, its thought, its story, its style, its purpose, moral, intellectual, or aesthetic.

2. That a stronger interest is developed by the study of the same thing for a number of weeks, and that the interest grows as the pupils progress.

3. That a much deeper insight into the author's meaning and purpose is secured by this long study of one selection.

4. That the moral effect of a complete masterpiece is deeper and more permanent; that the characters acting in different situations reveal the author's motives; and that the thread of his thought is shown in a steady sequence.

5. That a complete masterpiece studied as a whole shows the author's power.

6. That a classic is often a picture of an age, a panoramic survey of an historical epoch; and that the only way to get the complete picture is to study the whole.

Now for the answers to these points:

1. All those that make use of the long classics, with the above purposes in mind in the teaching of oral reading, are confusing two subjects, Literature and Oral Reading—subjects which, in their teaching, ought to be kept far apart. The study of oral reading is one thing; that of literature, another. In one sense, we all agree that they are one subject. There can be no practice of oral reading without literature; no study of literature without reading. But the training required for growth in these two subjects is, or should be, essentially different. In the class in literature, we aim at the largest appropriation of the great thoughts and feelings of our race; in the oral reading class, we are seeking the exercise of the pupil's individual power to express such of these thoughts as he is capable of making vitally his own. One purpose or set of purposes should dominate in the teaching of oral reading; another set of purposes must dominate in the teaching of literature. These purposes carried out bring the subjects together in time. Before that time, there should be a long period when they should be kept distinctly apart. The reasons for this are not far to seek.

2. Probably all teachers acknowledge that growth in any study depends to a greater or less extent upon the interest taken in that subject. In the study of reading, however, growth to the greatest extent depends upon interest. There is little danger of making too much of this point. There are just as many individualities in the class as there are pupils, and the study of these individualities is the teach-

er's work. Each individual mind has its own peculiar needs, and the teacher of reading, as much as any other, must make a study of these needs and adapt the work to them. She must find out what will aid most in the growth, what will interest most, and then supply the material accordingly. It does not seem reasonable to say that any one poem or story or oration can give the matter needed to arouse and keep alive the absorbing interest of a large number of children—an interest strong enough to produce growth; and I do not now recall the classic that can furnish the great variety essential to the development of the diversity of minds and characters found to be in every class.

I believe that the dreary droning over of a classic, day after day for weeks and months, certainly kills the pupil's interest in the classic. If such a work as Evangeline, for instance, were studied as it should be in oral reading, it would be divided into parts. Each part would be taken to pieces, drilled on and worked over from a number of points of view. There would be the necessary painstaking care of the articulation; the needed repetitions of hard words; the urgent call for getting the thoughts, pictures, and situations; the committing of the best lines; the oral expression; the dramatic readings—and so on indefinitely. By the time this work, which must cover from two to three months, is done, what is left of Evangeline as a poem? All poetry, romance, and deliciousness have been sacrificed to drill work. Reverence for the thing itself is gone. Undue familiarity, too intimate an acquaintance has dispelled its charm and made it all common. Everything is known. Nothing is left to the fancy or imagination. Poetry and romance have become prosaic platitudes. Violets and roses have become dry and expressionless.

Instead of this long weary study, which must tire the teacher as much as the pupil, why not take a vivid, interesting passage from this poem? Give it its proper setting by a lively review of the story; illuminate it; throw a glamour of romance about it; arouse expectancy; then, with the class in sympathy, read it orally for all there is in it. Then drop it. I feel sure that the interest aroused by such study will be lasting enough to send the pupil to the poem itself, to make him read the whole for his own pleasure. Then in his reading, there will be no tiring work on detail. Instead, he will be absorbed in the main lines of the plot, the play of the characters, and the march of events; and unconsciously he will read into the whole the illuminating points given by the teacher in the study of the part. In the meantime, in the class, work has moved on to other things. There will be study on a beautiful poem today, some powerful lines from an oration tomorrow, a story the next day, and so on; and interest will grow from day to day as the outlook broadens.

3. As to securing a deeper insight into the author's meaning and purpose by long study, there can be no doubt. It certainly should be so. But what of it? Will not the student get this insight in his regular study of literature when the time comes for it? And will this insight into the purpose and power of one author in one selection help the student in his oral expression in general? Will it give him versatility? Will it give him power to adapt himself readily to different styles? Is it all important that a pupil be saturated with the style, diction, and rhythm of Miles Standish, we will say, to the exclusion, for the time being, of all other forms of literature? Will he not grow faster if he is made to struggle with forms that require different kinds of effort of purpose? The purpose of the orator is perhaps to make people think and act along a definite line. Although he may excite the imagination and play upon the emotions, he all the while is trying

to dominate the will. The poet is almost exclusively absorbed with the aesthetic and his effects are produced through appeals to the imagination and feelings. The story-teller asks for sympathy for and with his characters as they move before the eye of the reader; he deals with human motives, passions, and purposes; he interprets human nature. The essayist makes demands upon the judgment and reasoning powers. The reader is asked to think, to analyze, to weigh and consider. These are a few of the many varieties of literature that may be placed before oral reading classes. Will not the pupil who is helped to express himself through the medium of these different styles, to interpret these diverse thoughts, emotions, and purposes, grow faster in expressiveness, in adaptability to the new, in versatility, in insight, than the one who is kept for weeks upon a work that reveals the style, diction, purpose, and power of one man in one production?

4. It may be, also, as has been contended, that the moral effect of a complete masterpiece is deeper and more permanent, but what after all is meant by the moral effect? Does it mean getting the point of a sermon, the text, the underlying thought? Or does it mean the growing realization of what is charming, beautiful, exquisite, noble? Does it not mean intellectual growth, a response to the aesthetic in the work studied, a quickened pulse, a thrill of delight at a happy turning of a phase of thought, the quick grasp of a startling situation, or the discovery of a new character? Whatever it means, there is no doubt that it may be cultivated more quickly through coming in contact with a variety of material than through long study on a single work.

5—6. All of the other points given to provet hat the use of the long selection is better adapted to oral reading than the short—as, that one gets the author's thought more fully in a

steady sequence, that a classic is often a picture of an age, and so on—must be passed over. The experienced teacher knows that much of this is gained through the study of the short selection, not so fully, to be sure, as through effort upon an entire work,—but why should it be? All of this kind of culture comes to the student of literature proper. The problem of the reading teacher is a very different one. She is making an effort to help her children gain: First, in smoothness of articulation and enunciation; second, in the use of the voice; third, in the training of the eye and ear; fourth, in sensing thoughts; fifth, in expressing thoughts; sixth, in growth in freedom; seventh, in cultivating in general a taste for reading and for good literature.

A way of bringing all of this about is to place before the pupil the very best that literature offers. The choice must be as varied as his needs, or as the needs of the class. One pupil in a class can grasp the thought of an oration, but he sees nothing in poetry. A poem, to him, is merely a composition made up of long and short lines, every one of which begins with a capital letter. The sentiment that could inspire "Hark! hark! the lark!" or "I wandered lonely as a cloud," he knows nothing about. For his own sake, he must be taught to recognize these elements of beauty when he sees them. Another boy may quickly enjoy and grasp the action of the characters in a story. He may have a dramatic instinct for the movements and motives of people. He is entirely unable to see any of the deep purpose in some essay or oration. If he does not study the heavier forms of literature and get a background for his dramatic taste, this dramatic instinct is sure to lead him to things cheap and common. One pupil needs help along one line, another needs something different.

The teacher does the most good to the greatest number by giving variety in subject-matter to her classes in oral reading.

The rollicking Blind Man's Buff sketch will enliven all. The quickly responsive will enjoy it fully, the unresponsive will be helped by making the effort to enjoy. The whole class, tomorrow, will examine "The Blue Gentian" and find undreamed of beauty there. Next week, Mr. Pickwick and his inimitable coterie will arouse a surprising enthusiasm. Some other day, the life and action in "How They Brought the Good News From Ghent to Aix" will thrill the class. And so on indefinitely.

There is no doubt to my mind that the art side of this subject can be more readily reached through the use of the short selection, not only art in the teaching, in the instilling of artistic purpose and feeling, but art in the expressing of purpose and feeling. Along with this there is less danger of the mechanical side's being made too much of. All teachers know the evils that arise from the use of mechanics, evils that deceive by seeming to secure results quickly. Among other things, the use of mechanics produces what is sometimes a great evil, imitation,—imitation that results in a decided narrowing and confining of powers, imitation that interferes with the growth of power to originate and create, imitation that produces superficiality and that kills all spontaneity in expression. One of the beauties of oral reading or expression is the spontaneous response of the whole nature to the thought, the quick feeling that changes as the thought changes, the expression of the face and the color of the voice, which grow out of the play of the imagination;—all this and more belongs to the art of expression. The use of mechanics in this art is withering in its effect.

In this study, there must be progression in development, and this progression absolutely demands variety of literature. Growth begins at a certain point and goes on from there. It moves from the plane of the common to the uncommon, from

the real to the ideal, from the ideal to the suggestive. A simple example will in part illustrate this growth. Some pupils, no matter what their age or condition, see little on a page but words. Take one of this class, one that can pronounce words moderately well. The highest emotion this pupil is able to express at first, perhaps, is the coarse anger, the petty rage of a Mrs. Caudle. If he has the saving grace of a sense of humor, he may be able to respond to the broad fun of some of the people of Dickens. After a large response of this kind to characters and scenes of a certain type, it will be found that in the study of a poem, pictures will form themselves more quickly. Little by little his taste takes him away from the coarse and bald to the beautiful or heroic in the world of man and nature about him. Before long he will be feeling and expressing some of the joy that the poets felt when they wrote their most perfect lyrics. It is not too much to say that he will really appreciate the delicate delight of the dancing daffodils, that the flight of the skylark as it "melts into the pale purple even" will be something more than the mere flying away of a bird. Not only the pictures of such poems, but the sentiments that called them into being, the subjective processes that underlie them, in a measure he will feel and appreciate.

This same evolution may be seen in character study. For example, when our pupils take up any part of a play, we will say The Merchant of Venice, the only emotion that can be aroused, in fact the only emotion that can be asked for at first, in the study of Shylock, is one of a very low order. A very small part of the personal, impotent rage and anger of Shylock towards Antonio and his class is all that can be expressed. Gradually, by appeals to something higher in their natures, the feeling that they give to Shylock rises to a higher plane. As they study the life of this man, and see

what his sufferings were, through his own inherited tendencies and those of his natural enemies, the Christians; when they look upon him, and see instead of the traditional Jew, an old man with the whole world, including his only child, against him; when, in short, they begin to realize that he is flesh and blood, sympathy takes the place of scorn. A look of pity replaces the smile which in early study of this character usually comes at the revilings of Antonio and his friends; and as realization grows, a nobler emotion arouses a finer response in the reader than the first, which found expression in ranting and raving. This response affects the face, the voice, the whole body because it is aroused from within, because it is the expression of a real, a living sympathy for this man and his race.

Let us take one speech of Shylock's to illustrate. It is that long speech in which he sums up his personal wrongs and those of his whole tribe. One morning Shylock was walking along a street in Venice, busy with his thoughts, which were bitter enough just then. Jessica, his daughter, had eloped with a Christian and, moreover, had taken with her money and jewels belonging to her father. Shylock did not come out upon the street to tell the story of this additional sorrow to anyone; but, he is met by two young fellows, friends of Antonio's. These creatures buzz around him, sting him, and irritate him to such a degree that he finally turns upon them, and in the anger, rage, and heat of the moment, delivers this tremendous speech. Now, in our reading classes, when we take this scene up for the first time, the pupils jumble the parts together. You remember that Shylock says, "He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason? I am a Jew." The pupil at

first does not differentiate these wrongs. To him they are all alike. He does not realize what "scorned my nation" means to Shylock. "Thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies" mean no more to this pupil, in an early reading, than "John spilled my ink" would mean—not so much in some cases. And so he reads these statements just as he conceives them.

The reading is dull and colorless. There is no depth in the thought, no slide in the voice, nothing that would indicate shades of thought. But when he realizes that each one of these statements comes from a deep underlying sense of wrong, that the wrongs are as numerous and as various as the statements themselves, after he reflects upon the life of Shylock, upon the position he holds in the social and business world, then color comes to the voice, action comes to the body, in fact expression is given to these thoughts. You see he has something within to express. His work is lifted from the plane of the very realistic, perhaps not to the suggestive—only rarely do we reach that plane,—but at least towards the ideal.

This pupil is discovering truth. And now when he is nearing the ideal, on his way to the suggestive, turn him to the breadth and majesty of the book of Kings, of Isaiah, of Job, to the beauty of the Gospel narratives, to the exquisite imaginative play of fancy of the Revelations, to the adoration and exaltation of the Psalms. One difficulty that stands in the way of bringing these selections into the reading class, is a feeling that the thoughts and emotions are too high, that the average pupil cannot attain to anything like an adequate expression of such sentiments, and yet in the whole field of literature, there is none that sets forth so wide a range of human experience as these and similar productions. The problem is the point of contact and the case is not essentially

different from that of Shylock's speech. In grasping the emotions of Shylock, the pupil began with the kind of petty indignation of which he himself was capable, and grew to a realization of just and righteous anger. So in reading this magnificent literature, the expression might have the same personal narrowness. The pupil's own power of love and gratitude would at first set the limits of his expression of David's praise and adoration; but a growing sense of the occasion, the depth of David's feeling, and the world-wide meaning of a great psalm would gradually break down the barriers and open the way to a fuller and deeper emotional content.

The expression of such content is the reflection of the inner-man, of much of his life; and there can be no expression of the noble, the majestic, the beautiful, no realization of the fanciful, no belief in that which is suggested by the miracle—there can be no such expression unless there are in the reader elements, at least, of nobility, beauty, majesty, breadth of thought. The cultivation of all this is where the art side of the teaching of reading is shown. Grateful results are early apparent, not only in upper grades, but in all grades where reading is taught. And of these results, a few are—versatility, a readiness, an alertness of both body and mind, to say nothing of actual growth in character.

To sum up briefly:

First. Oral reading as a subject in the grades should be a part of every school programme every day.

Second. As oral reading is to accomplish a certain end, and as there are too few real classics to admit of the spoiling of even one, the study of the long classics should be left to the teacher of literature.

Third. As all elements necessary for the growth of the student of expression are not to be found in a single story or

poem or oration, the teacher gives the most good to the greatest number by using, in oral reading classes, a large variety of short selections.

Fourth. Oral reading should be approached more from the art side. It should be made, not a means for the gleaning of facts or the advancement of pedagogical methods, but a medium for the best expression of the best thoughts and feeling from the best books.